

Alexandria magnetism draws more than Vikings, fishermen

Alexandria, Minn.
An overnight drive north-west on Hwys. 10, 52 and 194 to Alexandria is easy and rewarding — and not only because you get to stop at Sauk Centre's Sinclair Lewis Home, although that's nice, too.

Alexandria, with its handsome lakes, always has been a summertime attraction to Minneapoli-tans. I remember spending an Independence Day holiday there at an affluent uncle's lakeshore cottage where we spent most of the day shooting off fire-crackers under a tin can.

In the evening we drove around to see the sky rockets burst over the various lakes. It was most im-pressive, both the rockets and the gas bargues, far less powerful and pollut-ing than today's, although the fireworks did their share, with essence of gunpowder.

Nobody in our circles talked, much less argued, about the Kensington Runestone, dug up about three decades earlier, in 1898, on a farm in the county where it purport-edly was left, to quote from its hieroglyphy, by "8 Goths and 22 Norwegi-ans on exploration jour-ney" in 1222.

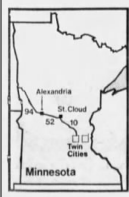
Since then it has reposed at New York's Century of Progress World's Fair and given rise to a Runestone Museum at the north end of Alexandria's main street, Broadway, and spor-adic controversies about whether it's a bona fide relic or a pioneer farmer's practical joke.

A scientific friend, whose opinions I trust, has made a runestone agnostic out of me, by saying, "Nobody really knows enough about the 'runes' (hiero-glyphic markings) to prove it one way or the other."

Nevertheless, I find the Runestone Museum a de-lightful place, not only for the mysterious monolith on its circular center dais, but for its peripheral pi-oneer wonders, such as a pioneer cabin kitchen, some interesting wildlife taxidermy, a (unique in my experience) stuffed pet dog warming itself by the cabin fireplace and, across the room, a settee and chair made of skeletons from its owner's favorite horses.

This is not to mention old medical equipment, dental devices, typewriters, stoves, tools, knives and a remarkable rifle collec-tion. There is also an Indi-an Mounds Museum on County Road 29 northeast of town.

Museums, however, are far from the main course



Ben Kern
your weekend

at modern Alexandria, which is burgeoning faster than inflation is inflating.

Besides bass, walleye and panfish fishing at its many resorts and Lake Carlos State Park several miles due north (camping sites, showers, rental boats, launching area, bathing beach), Alexandria has be-come a kind of milling center for conventions.

The Chamber of Com-merce has figured meeting room capacities at the Vik-ing Motel, Garden Cen-ter, Holiday Inn and Ar-rowwood Lodge to be enough for 1,200 conven-tioneers.

The king pin is the Arrow-wood, a \$10-million year-round place with 300 em-ployees summers and 90 to 100 winters. Now in its second season, it has golf, riding, swimming, snow-mobiling and all that.

The lodge, seen across Lake Darling as one drives in, looks like a cliff-dwell-er's metropolis. It is fin-ished in handsplit shakes and covers an entire hill-side that slopes into a lakeside lawn the size of two or three football fields, with a fringe of sandy beach.

Finding the overnight rate (\$30 a couple, lakeside) too rich for my blood, I treat-ed my wife to lunch there and talked one of the staff into showing us around. He gave us the full tour. It was better than most museums.

There are luxury rooms with two-story windows where a Hollywood pro-ducer could film "Private Lives" without changing a thing. The decor and color scheme change from room to room.

Quite aside from tourism, Alexandria is developing residential districts worth a rubberneck once-over. The newest of these is Crestwood Hills, on Lake LeHomme, Dena northeast on Hwy. 29, backed by a group of doctors.

The backers corralled Don Lundgren, Eko Backen trophy maker and ski area operator from Forest Lake, as he was about to buy a small tract for a driving range on the Alex-andria outskirts.

He agreed to buy the land at a bargain price and de-velop an 18-hole Crest-wood Hills golf course and ski area back from and overlooking the lake on which shore the Crest-wood people dwell.

I found Lundgren, whom I had met before, happy as a tick despite a bad skiing season weatherwise. He has a hilltop house, a cap-a-cious chalet-country club, a mammoth ski hill with ropes and stowmak-ing, golf turf abuilding

with little green spears sprouting clear across a vast, newly plotted domain.

His chalet was full of women's club meeting where, he advised, he had agreed to sing.

If indeed the "8 Goths and 22 Norwegians" left that stone in Douglas County, their eyes would pop if they could see what's going on here today.

Slides and talk will show and explain the technique of rock climbing at the Minnesota Rovers Outing Club weekly meeting, 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, 123 Science Classroom Building, Uni-versity of Minnesota main campus, Public Invis, e.d. For information call 822-0569.

Patrick Redig will talk on rehabilitating birds of prey at a Minnesota Bird Club meeting, 8 p.m. Wed-nesday, Bell Museum of Natural History, University and 17th Avs. S.E.

Craft classes on cornhusk and appleed dolls, wal-nut-shell pin cushions, needle cases, pomander balls and other 19th cen-tury items start Wednesday, 7 to 9:30 p.m. Gibbs Farm Museum, 2097 W. Larpenteur, Falcon Heights, and continue four weeks (\$15). Quilting classes start May 10 (810). Call 646-0624. (Ramsey County Histori-cal Society) to register.

"Minnesota Minnetours," a map with 12 tours and alternate routes plus de-scriptions of things to see and do along the way and suggested drives for au-tumn colors, published by the Minnesota Department of Economic Development, is available from "Disco-very," 51 E. 8th St., St. Paul 55101. No charge.

Touring Films on Spain and on Grand Canyon and Bryce and Zion National Parks, 2:15 and 3:30 p.m., American Swedish In-stitute, 2600 Park Av.

More Museums that didn't get listed in our April 8 Minnesota com-pendium: Pipestone Coun-ty Historical Museum, 113 S. Hawatha Av., Pipe-stone 56164, ph. (507) 825-4434. Housed in a for-mer city office, pumping, fire station and courts building the museum has pioneer articles, period rooms, antique furniture, war materials, Indian arti-facts and a library.

Lac Qui Parle County Mu-seum, S. Madison & Hwy. 5, Madison 56256. Indian

Someone forgot to invite fish
Associated Press

Kidderminster, England To find their angling champion, 200 national ambulance servicemen fished a stretch of canal in Worcestershire in a com-petition. But after five hours, nobody had caught anything.

Later, a local fisherman reported all the canal's fish had been moved to other waters three weeks earlier.

Another contest has been arranged.

artifacts, pioneer tools, country store, war memo-rials, early kitchen, parlor, bedroom, rural school house, log cabin, library. Hours: 1:30-5 p.m. Sun. and Wed.-Fri.



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